

Member-at-Large Candidate René Lemieux's answer to written questions.

1. Question

“Given that Concordia's administration has already unilaterally restructured teaching conditions through LTA non-renewals, sabbatical deferrals, and a hiring freeze, what is your strategy for negotiating a new collective agreement that meaningfully protects faculty working conditions, and how will you ensure CUFA does not simply ratify an austerity agenda under the guise of financial necessity?”

Sent in by Gabriel Vigliensoni

Answer by René Lemieux

The premise of the question is important: the administration has already acted unilaterally—through LTA non-renewals, sabbatical deferrals, and a hiring freeze—and that raises serious concerns about good faith. We should be clear-eyed about that going into negotiations.

My strategy has two components: strengthening our leverage and sharpening our demands. On leverage, CUFA must invest in mobilization, visibility, and alliances—both internally and across Quebec. Many faculty unions are facing similar austerity measures, and coordination increases pressure. We should also push for greater financial transparency, including independent audits and access to budgetary data, so “financial necessity” cannot be used as an opaque justification.

On substance, we need enforceable protections: greater job security for LTAs, clearer workload recognition—including informal and invisible labour—and explicit language on artificial intelligence and technological change, where ambiguity currently exposes members to risk.

Finally, CUFA should not ratify an austerity agenda under the guise of inevitability. A union's role in negotiations is not to react, but to define the terms of what is acceptable.

2. Question

“Last year you received some criticism about the fact that you did not consult the union membership prior to voting at the CAUT Fall Council. Can you please clarify your view of a CUFA delegate at these meetings?”

Sent in by Csaba Nikolenyi

Answer by René Lemieux

I will answer this question in my capacity as a councillor who signed the open letter raising concerns about the position taken at CAUT. I believe a CUFA delegate to CAUT must be both formally mandated and able to exercise informed judgment. Neither free agents nor proxies, delegates must nonetheless act within a collectively defined framework.

In this case, however, the issue was not complexity or urgency. The question of “political neutrality” was significant, foreseeable, and clearly political. It should have been discussed at Council beforehand. There were no practical constraints preventing deliberation.

More broadly, I believe CUFA should develop better mechanisms for member consultation on such questions, including open forums where different positions can be debated. Just as importantly, delegates must report back transparently and remain accountable to the membership. That feedback loop is essential, and it was lacking here.

When delegates take positions without prior consultation, and without meaningful reporting afterward, it creates a democratic gap. In my view, this is what happened in this instance.

Representation requires both judgment and accountability, but it cannot bypass collective deliberation. When it does, it risks substituting individual positions for the voice of the union as a whole.

3. Question

“Our next collective agreement negotiations may involve strike action. However, the impact of a strike is inequitable. Financial strain falls hardest on sole providers, renters, and mortgage holders—a pressure even more acute for new Canadians and permanent residents. How can we ensure the burden of collective action doesn't disproportionately harm our most precarious members?”

Sent in by Katja Neves

Answer by René Lemieux

The concern is valid: the burden of a strike is not distributed equally. But that inequality can be managed.

First, we should clarify the key points. Strike pay comes from a union fund and is generally lower than regular income. However, because it is non-taxable, the effective amount can be comparable to normal paycheck. That means the strength and structure of that fund are decisive. At present, it is not clear that CUFA provides transparency on whether its strike fund is sufficient. This is something I would prioritize.

Second, equity must guide distribution. Other unions in Quebec have adopted differentiated models, where lower-income members receive proportionally more support. That is the right direction. We should consider top-ups for more precarious members, including LTAs, as well as supports such as childcare.

Third, solidarity must be concrete. A strike cannot succeed if its costs are borne disproportionately by the most vulnerable. Those with greater financial capacity should contribute to a system that protects others.

Finally, the best way to reduce inequity is to shorten the strike. That requires building a strong power balance in advance—through mobilization and coordination—so that strike action is effective, and as brief as possible.